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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that examined the first 2.5 years of radical state intervention in the operation of the Jersey City Public Schools are presented in this paper. Control of the district was assumed by the state department of education in October 1989. The first section describes the historical background of takeover action in New Jersey and its legislated mandates. Methodology was based on field observation, document analysis, and a total of 24 interviews conducted with state takeover team members, new central office administrators, principals, and teachers. Eight followup interviews were conducted. Six of the implementation themes--time, the politics of waiting, expectations, insider-outsider conflict, communication, and scope--are used to explore the nature of state takeover as a means of creating a district culture with the capacity for self-improvement. Early evidence suggests that the district's ability to sustain positive and systemic educational change has not improved. The following issues must be addressed: insider-outsider conflict, timing, overly high expectations, communication, and goals and evaluation. Specific recommendations for a state intervention strategy are offered. One figure is included. (46 references) (LMI)

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POLICY ADAPTATION AND CHANGE: THE CASE OF THE STATE TAKEOVER OF THE JERSEY CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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On October 4, 1989, the school board, superintendent, and nine additional members of the central office administration of the Jersey City Public Schools were removed from office. Control of the district was assumed by the New Jersey State Department of Education. A State District Superintendent was appointed by the New Jersey State Board of Education. In what is arguably the most radical state intervention into the operation of local schools a state team of administrators is attempting to transform the Jersey City Public Schools into a school district which can provide a "thorough and efficient" education for the children of the city. While eight other states have laws on the books which permit varying forms of state takeover of local school districts, the state takeover of the Jersey City Public Schools is unprecedented in its scope (Kimbrough & McElrath, 1990; Bowers, 1989). This paper is a summary of a small exploratory study which looked at the first two and a half years of this radical attempt to improve a troubled urban school district.

The paper is divided into four sections. First, the context of the study is set through a discussion of the historical background of takeover in New Jersey and its legislated mandates. Second, relevant research and theory are used to create a theoretical framework for the study. The methods of research are described in the third section of the paper. Finally, six of the implementation themes which emerged from the study--time, the politics of waiting, expectations, insider-outsider conflict, communication, and scope--are used to explore the nature of state takeover as a change effort.

The Legal and Historical Background of the State Takeover of the Jersey City Public Schools

The passage of the takeover legislation by the New Jersey Legislature marked the culmination of 15 years of legislative efforts to improve the performance of deficient schools. In the landmark case of Robinson v. Cahill (1973) the Supreme Court of New Jersey held that the state's education system did not provide a "thorough and efficient" system of education as prescribed by the state constitution

(New Jersey State Constitution, Article VIII, sec. IV.) and ordered the state to delineate the fiscal and educational components of such a system. Subsequent to this decision the state legislature passed the Public Education Act, the so-called "thorough and efficient" ("T & E") law (1975). To comply with the provisions of the statute the state education department created a three-level monitoring system for local school districts, which were required to submit educational progress reports and budgets for state approval.

The state attempted to apply the significant monitoring and intervention power permitted through the T & E law on a number of occasions. Fiscal improprieties in Newark and East Orange were attacked by state auditors (Antonelli, 1990). The most extensive intervention attempted under the T & E law was the appointment of a monitor general of the Trenton Public Schools in November of 1979. This partial takeover, however, was viewed as a failure (Antonelli, 1990).

Governor Thomas Kean and Commissioner of Education Saul Cooperman pointed to the failure of the Trenton intervention when suggesting that greater state powers of intervention were required to ameliorate the deficiencies of failing school districts. Greater legal power was granted to the state with the passage of the state takeover legislation. Governor Kean signed the fifth version of the bill into law on January 13, 1988 (N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-14 et seq and -7A:15). These bills had undergone significant revision since their original introduction to the New Jersey Assembly on June 30, 1986. Points of contention included the tenure and due process rights of central office administrators and school principals, the dismissal of the local board of education, and state funding of the intervention (Antonelli, 1990). Upon the creation of the State-operated school district, the takeover law mandated the following major actions related to district reorganization:

- the immediate removal of the school board and the appointment of a 15 member advisory board within 60 days;

- the removal of the school superintendent, executive administrators for curriculum, personnel, business and finance, lawyers, and internal auditors;
- the evaluation of all central administrative and supervisory staff positions and a reorganization of these offices within six months;
- the evaluation and, if necessary, dismissal of any tenured school principals within one year from the time of the reorganization.

Administrators who were removed from their positions could "bump down" to jobs to which they previously had held tenure. Another key compromise provision of the bill involved financing the state-operated district. Although the State-District Superintendent was granted the power to set the budget and the level of taxes needed to fund it, the local municipal governing body could appeal this budget to the Commissioner to prevent the school district from "imposing an unreasonable tax burden" (N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-52).

Jersey City's Road to Takeover

The saga of the takeover of the Jersey City Public Schools most probably has its roots in the Jersey City tradition of mixing politics and education which dates back at least 70 years to the tenure of mayor and political boss Frank Hague (Reecer, 1988; Smith, 1982). More recently, however, the Jersey City Schools' troubles began when the district failed to meet state certification requirements as mandated by the T & E law. Subsequent to the failure of Level I monitoring in 1984, and Level II in 1986, the district moved into the final level of monitoring. The state conducted a preliminary Level III review (N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-14c) from January through April of 1987 which determined that it was unlikely that the school district would be able to achieve certification on its own. A comprehensive compliance investigation (CCI) was initiated in June of 1987 pursuant to N.J.S.A 18:7A-14e.

The results of these investigations were reported to the New Jersey State Department of Education in May of 1988 just five months after the passage of the takeover law. An outside review of district organization and management found severe deficiencies which are summarized as follows:

- o no guiding policy framework existed;
- o employment decisions including hiring, firing, promoting, and transferring were not guided by merit, but by political patronage, unionism, and cronyism;
- o the school board and senior administration had not developed an educational philosophy for the district, nor had they attended sufficiently to the establishment of goals and objectives, the assessment of students' needs, and the evaluation of personnel, programs, and student achievement;
- o the superintendent and senior administration had not been held accountable by the school board for their failure to perform; and
- o the organizational structure created by the superintendent was ill-designed and ineffective in ensuring the control, accountability, and success of educational programs (Summarized from Cresap, 1988).

In terms of student achievement, the Jersey City schools were not meeting minimum state standardized test levels. One such standard required that 75% of ninth grade students in each school pass the High School Proficiency Test in both reading and mathematics. While Jersey City was well above this level at the Academic High School with better than 90% of the students enrolled passing both tests during the 1985-86 and 1986-87 school years, all four neighborhood high schools were far below this minimum level with passing rates below 30% in 1985-86 and below 41% in 1986-87 (New Jersey State Department, 1988).

The finance investigation conducted by Peat Marwick Main and Company (1988) revealed that the district had failed to ensure efficient, effective, and appropriate business office procedures. There

were many violations of the Public Schools Contracts Law and the Internal Revenue Code. Careful oversight of expenditures was not maintained. Inconsistent methods for payroll distribution left the district open to potential misapplication of funds. Buildings and grounds were in deplorable conditions. Procedures for ordering educational supplies and materials were cumbersome and thwarted the efforts of teachers to provide appropriate instruction. The district had been either unable or unwilling to follow recommendations for improvement made in previous audits of financial procedures.

These reports, as well as the continued investigations of state department compliance staff, supported by voluminous documentation and testimony, formed the New Jersey State Department of Education Office of Compliance, Level III Report, Jersey City School District (Vols. I-III.) (1988), which recommended the following:

> Based upon the entirety of monitoring process and all its component parts, the inescapable conclusion is that the Jersey City Board of Education is either unwilling or unable to provide a thorough and efficient system of education. Since the district has continuously been unable or unwilling to correct its own problems, this report recommends the creation of a State-operated district pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-14 et seq. (p. 12)

These findings were issued on May 24, 1988, by Commissioner of Education Saul Cooperman in concert with an order for the district to "show cause" why such action should not be taken (McCarroll v. Board of Education of Jersey City, p. 8). The takeover was challenged in court by the Jersey City School Board, which expended 1.4 million dollars in legal fees in an attempt to maintain local control of the district (Bowers, 1989). An administrative law hearing was held before Judge Ken R. Springer from July 11, 1988, to March 3, 1989, during which the state shouldered the burden of showing that the order for takeover was not "arbitrary, unreasonable, or capricious" (N.J.S.A. 18A:7A-14(e).

On September 15, 1989, the primary defense of the Jersey City School Board was shattered when Judge Springer ruled that he would not entertain arguments in the district's defense regarding the issue of inequitable funding. In a landmark administrative court law ruling another court had found that the state's funding formula harmed older, poorer, urban districts (Abbot v. Burke).[1] In holding against the Jersey City Board on this matter Springer said: "The focus is whether Jersey City, using what funds were available to them, used those funds in such a way as to deliver a 'thorough and efficient' education" (Leir, 1988, p. 1).

On July 26, 1989, after 103 days of testimony and 21,000 pages of transcript, Administrative Law Judge Ken Springer upheld the findings of the and recommendations of the CCI stating that the Jersey City School Board had, "so lost its own way that it cannot be counted on to lead the children to educational quality" (McCarroll v. Board of Education of Jersey City, 1989, p. 25). He too recommended that the state assume control of the district in stating, "Jersey City's children had already waited long enough for the thorough and efficient education to which they are legally entitled" (p. 74).

Consequently the school board, superintendent, and senior administrative staff were dismissed and a state appointed superintendent of schools was assigned control of the Jersey City schools. The state-operated district has been established for a minimum period of five years.

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[1]. Jersey City had argued that their problems were the result of fiscal stress caused by an unfair funding plan and a needy student population. The enrollment of the Jersey City Public Schools for the 1991-92 school year was 29,170. Of these students, 68.1% qualified for free or reduced meals; 5,052 received some form of special education services, and 2,705 enrolled in bilingual programs.

Conceptual Framework

The research and theory regarding educational change has evolved during the past three decades in several parallel fashions. The following four trends offered a conceptual cradle from which the framework for the study of the takeover emerged.

From simple to complex views of change. Findings from the studies of the 60s, 70s and early 80s reflected the complexity of educational change and challenged the possibility of forming simple generalizations regarding the change process. Berman (1981) commented that "Simpler views prevalent during the fifties are being recast in more complex images of how school districts respond to pressures for change" (p. 256). Baldridge and Deal (1983) echoed this point: "Early change models were linear and predictable chains of activity.....We now know that the pathway between planning and implementation is rocky: new ideas are buffeted by nearly everyone, and are terribly difficult to evaluate" (p. 6). Fullan (1982) summarized the perplexity of the problem of change as follows: "The number and dynamics of factors which interact and affect the process of educational change are too overwhelming to compute in anything resembling a fully determined way" (p. 39). This important, yet at times frustrating, realization of the complexity of change was matched by other shifts in focus.

From an emphasis on content to an emphasis on process. The emphasis of study in the field of educational change moved from the "content" of change to the "process" of change (Berman 1981; Fullan, 1982; McLaughlin, 1987; Sarason, 1982). Prior to this shift, if an innovation made sense to its inventors, had been used successfully in another location, and could be funded, it was assumed that those in the field would embrace it. The importance of understanding change as a process and the development of a theory of "changing" was the central message of Fullan's (1982) The Meaning of Educational Change.

From an emphasis on adoption to an emphasis on implementation. Logically nested within the shift from content to process has been the move to focus study on the involvement of individuals in the complex problems of implementation (Fullan, 1982). Sarason (1982) disputed the "adoption is necessary and sufficient" assumption in his discussion of the failures of school districts to implement effectively the "New Math". Yin (1978) found that most large-scale studies of change explored the adoption phase and the measurement of outcomes; implementation was inferred rather than actually documented. Berman & McLaughlin (1979) offered a possible reason for previous ignorance of the importance of the implementation process: "The pressures [for change] seem to subside with the act of adoption followed by the appearance of implementation" (p. 1).

Studies in the 1970s underscored the crucial role implementation plays in the determination of the success of an educational change (Emrick et al., 1977; Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). Results from the Study of Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement (DESSI): People, Policies, and Practices: Examining the Chain of School Improvement (Vols I-IX) (Crandall et al, 1982), reinforced previous findings: "...adopting an innovation does not ensure its actual use and that the educational graveyard is full of adoptions that were never implemented, or indifferently implemented" (Huberman & Crandall, 1982, p. 41).

From an emphasis on organizations to an emphasis on individuals. Research in the area of educational change supports the notion that change is experienced differently by different stakeholders (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975; Crandall et al., 1982; Fullan, 1982). "As with other aspects of change, clarification and skill in using new resources is a process in which demonstration materials may represent the starting point-- but it is what *people develop* in their minds and actions that count" (Fullan, 1982, p. 62). Because change is so idiosyncratic, the success of any change effort is dependent to a large extent upon the attention that is paid to providing opportunities for individuals to develop meaning in relation to a specific policy or program (Fullan, 1982, p. 62).

As the problems of implementation began to be understood, awareness of the importance of individual implementors increased. McLaughlin (1987) observed:

> This perspective shifts the focus of analysis away from institutions and institutional goals to individuals and individual incentives, beliefs, and capacity. Organizations don't innovate or implement change, individuals do. Individuals responsible for carrying out a policy, act not only from institutional incentives, but also from professional and personal motivation" (p. 174).

These four trends offered a conceptual basis for the study which was further refined by two differing perspectives on implementation. The fidelity/programmatic perspective suggested that for change efforts to be successful, innovations or policies must be adhered to faithfully; therefore, implementation should focus upon strategies which carefully layout goals, procedures, lines of authority, rewards, and punishments. The mutual-adaptation/evolution perspective argued that for change to be successful both the policy (or innovation) and the implementer must adapt. Consequently, evolutionary implementation strategies must provide freedom and support for "learning by doing" (Berman, 1980, 1981; McLaughlin, 1987).

Berman (1980) has suggested that the advisability of applying either planned programmatic strategies (the fidelity approach) or mutual-adaptation strategies to problems of implementation may depend upon situational factors. These situational parameters include the scope of the change, the certainty of the technology or theory, the conflict over the policy's goals and means, the structure of the institutional setting, and the stability of the outside environment.

This framework was employed as a way to think about and plan for the study of the policy changes occurring in the Jersey City Public Schools. The following research questions were generated:

How are the policy initiatives of the state team understood and adapted by individuals within the state team, the (new)[2] central administration, the ranks of the principals, and the teaching staff?

What situational parameters (Berman, 1980) affect the adaptations of these individuals?

What are the characteristics of the Jersey City takeover, and how does it compare and contrast to other major school district administrative changes (i.e. The typical central office shuffle when a new superintendent is appointed.)?

Initiatives being implemented in the Jersey City Schools were outlined in two documents: the Corrective Action Plan (Ellis & Scambio, 1990) and the annual statement of district objectives. It was decided to begin study on four of these policies based upon the following criteria:

- the policy's effects had a reasonable chance of being felt by teachers;
- the choice of the policy added to the variation of predicted adaptation based upon an analysis of the policy using Berman's framework, and
- the researcher's interest.

These a priori choices served as the starting point for the study. As it turned out three of the chosen policy initiatives were of great interest; the fourth--improvements in attendance-keeping--had yet to be acted upon in any noticeable fashion and was dropped from the study. The initial policies chosen were the following:

- the implementation of school-based management,
- the improvement of mathematics test scores,
- the revision of standard operating procedures for attendance keeping and guidance, and
- the prohibition of the solicitation of funds for political purposes.

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[2]. "New" central office administrators are locals who remained in the central office ranks after the April 4, 1990, district reorganization.

In an attempt to avoid making this a "top-down" study, respondents also were asked to suggest other effects being felt, which in their opinion were related to the takeover. Several of these policy areas also were investigated during the course of the study.

Method

The aforementioned research questions implied a set of axioms about the nature of knowledge. These assumptions undergird what has been called the "naturalistic paradigm" and suggested a particular methodology of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an effort to uncover how individual teachers, principals, new central office administrators, and state team members understood and adapted to several policy initiatives occurring as part of the takeover, a study was conducted which employed qualitative research methods. The use of qualitative methods within the naturalistic paradigm carried with it the need for an emergent design which unfolded during the course of the inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The methodological discussion that follows describes the process of gaining permission to undertake the study, the original guide and rationale for sampling procedures, methods of data collection, techniques of data analysis, and strategies employed to enhance trustworthiness, as well as the changes in method that evolved during the course of the study.

Gaining access. My introduction to the context of the study came in May of 1990 when I first visited the Jersey City Public Schools as part of a team from the University of Virginia seeking a grant to conduct training and research on an innovative elementary and middle school scheduling technique. The grant application was successful. Subsequent visits during the summer and fall of 1990 made me aware of the takeover and piqued my interest regarding this unique and radical state intervention into the governance of a local school district. Conversations with the two school principals with whom I was working suggested a focus on the principals' role in takeover as a topic for my dissertation research. I mailed a short research proposal to the State District Superintendent,

who passed it on to an executive assistant. Because the principals were involved in an intense evaluation, the executive assistant dissuaded me from focusing on that role. We negotiated back and forth during November and December of 1990. My research proposal was accepted by my doctoral committee in mid-January, and in a meeting with the State District Superintendent's executive assistant in late January 1991 I was given permission to conduct the study.

Data sources, data collection, and data analysis. Informal data collection began from the moment I set foot into the Jersey City Schools in May of 1990. The predominant formal means of acquiring data during this inquiry, however, was the interview. My original plan called for a minimum of two interviews of one to two hours with each of approximately 15 respondents. During the course of the study it was necessary to add more respondents to obtain the diversity of background I desired for the sample. Consequently, 24 people were interviewed during the first round of data collection. These sessions took place between January 30, 1991, and May 9, 1991. After a preliminary analysis of the first round data, eight of the original respondents were chosen for a second interview. Second round interviews were completed between June 11 and July 15, 1991. Other valuable sources of data included the following: district and cluster newsletters; three and a half years of newspaper articles; legislative committee hearing transcripts; written district plans including the Corrective Action Plan (Ellis & Scambio, 1990), the plan for site-based management, and the unified equity plan; district budgets; and informal observations conducted during many visits to the district.

Sessions with respondents were conducted with the use of an interview guide. Initial queries were open-ended; follow-up questions focused upon the details of specific policies and changes that had occurred. As might have been expected, the interview guide was just that--a guide, not a formal template of immutable questions, but a general reference point for the interviews that were held.

Only five of the 24 respondents of the study permitted audio-taping; as one school principal put it: "I've been burned by a tape before". Transcripts were made of these interviews. Summaries of the un-taped interviews were created from extensive interview notes taken during each session.

The choice of policies to begin the study with was made partly because these policies might have had an impact on the respondents: members of the state takeover team, new central office administrators, principals, and teachers. For purposes of this study "state team" were the outsiders who were either appointed by the state or hired as part of the takeover team. New central office administrators, principals, and teachers all were employed by the Jersey City Public Schools prior to the takeover; they were the insiders.

The sample was assembled by utilizing strategies of "purposeful sampling" (Patton, 1990, pp. 169-186). Three approaches were employed to amass the final group of respondents: sampling to attain maximum variation, sampling politically important cases, and sampling by nomination. Respondents were selected with the goal of obtaining a sample with maximum variation for the purpose of "...capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation" (Patton, 1990, p. 172). An attempt was made; therefore, to balance the sample by the following characteristics of respondents: level of school, gender, race, ethnicity, job classification, residence, and cluster affiliation.[3] Secondly, politically important cases, including the State District Superintendent, the acting executive director of the Jersey City Education Association (JCEA), and the head of the Principals' and Supervisors' Association (PSA) were respondents for the study.

The third strategy, sampling by nomination, served to blend and balance the previous two techniques. Choosing the superintendent, a teacher union leader, or a leader in the administrative

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[3]. The April 4, 1990 district reorganization divided the schools of the district into four semi-autonomous clusters.

association might unduly skew the data. To guard against this and achieve the desired variation I asked for nominations with the question: "Who would be a good information source, but might have a different perspective than you?" Based upon these nominations, the criteria for obtaining maximum variation, and the continual focusing of the inquiry, additional respondents were chosen.

Data collection was not without problems. Diligent secretaries protected access to state team members. The State District Superintendent's assistant interceded on my behalf to arrange interviews. The fact that I did have the permission of the state was a source of suspicion on the part of the locals. Contacts with knowledgeable locals were made through referrals. The sample, therefore, developed from the top down and from the bottom up.

Respondents were informed of the reasonable possibilities for confidentiality. The State District Superintendent, reserved some remarks from the public record; neither s/he nor the acting president of the JCEA, were promised confidentiality. The head of the PSA permitted me to mention that s/he had been interviewed to lend credence to my claim that I had sampled politically important cases; but, the confidentiality of these remarks was protected. The lower I moved on the bureaucratic ladder the more I was able to promise regarding my part in maintaining confidentiality.

All analyses were guided by the use of the constant comparison method (Glasser and Strauss, 1967); therefore, analysis began with the very first interview and continued until the completion of the writing of the study. Interview transcripts and summaries were transferred into the Ethnograph (Seidel, et al., 1988). The analysis of first round data sought to accomplish the following:

- Identification of the policy areas that seemed to be most important for continued study;
- Identification of "cross-policy" themes; and
- Identification of gaps in the data related to the important policy areas and cross-policy themes.

Insights gathered during the first round were used to choose second round respondents and new questions. Eight of the original 24 respondents (two from each job classification) were selected for

the second round based upon their credibility, knowledge, and willingness to participate. All three politically important respondents continued.

Data collection in the second round proceeded very smoothly. During the first round of interviews everything had been a revelation for me, but in the second sessions very little new information or insights were forthcoming. As each interview was held I found myself thinking that now I was a better general source of information regarding the takeover than were any of my respondents. Still I realized that my study and the resultant "working hypotheses" were limited; I had "iterated to redundancy" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 188), but only with my small sample of respondents. I completed the second round on July 15, 1991. Second round analysis of data followed the same pattern of the first round; however, newspapers, hearing transcripts, and a variety of documents also were utilized to corroborate information gathered during the interviews.

The trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the study has been supported by procedures designed to enhance its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Five strategies were used to ensure credibility. The case for prolonged engagement (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) is enhanced because the researcher was involved in data collection over a period of 22 months. Approximately 40 days were spent in the district. Two methods of triangulation (Patton, 1990) enhance the credibility. Triangulation occurred among multiple interview sources. In addition, district and school documents, newspaper clippings, hearing transcripts and observations were used to corroborate interview data. Peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), served as a sounding board for the emergent design, analysis, and working hypotheses of the study. Member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was employed in two different manners. Interview summaries from both rounds of data collection were shared with and corrected by respondents to ensure accuracy. The second form of member-checking was accomplished during the second round of interviews as the initial analysis was tested with each respondent. Finally, the credibility of the data analysis used in the study was

supported through the use of referential adequacy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 313). Four interview summaries were archived prior to analysis. At the completion of the writing of the study, one of these interviews was analyzed in light of the working hypotheses that had been formulated; this analysis supported the conclusions of the study.

Transferability was enhanced through the use of "thick description." By describing the background and setting in great detail and using the actual words of respondents, readers should have sufficient contextual information to allow for transfer.

Both dependability and credibility have been improved by leaving a detailed audit trail during the course of data collection and analysis. The audit trail includes raw data in the form of audiotapes and written school and district documents; data reduction products, including field notes and interview summaries; various iterations of coded data printouts; products of analyses, including lists of codes and categories, charts and integrative diagrams; the methodological log; and the "person-as-instrument" statement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The methodological log served as the organizing structure for the audit trail; all important research design and analysis decisions were supported and documented in the log.

Takeover as a Mechanism for Educational Change

My respondents identified a number of early successes and problems with the takeover of the Jersey City Public Schools during the course of the study. Data suggest that early successes included the following:

- buildings were cleaner; some facilities improvements were made;
- principals were involved in the hiring of instructional and non-instructional staff;
- schools were granted greater control over budgetary choices; more money was available for the purchase of instructional supplies;

- o the State District Superintendent had made a favorable impression upon the business community; several school/business partnerships were in the works;
- o local political influence upon personnel decisions had decreased; and
- o the sale of tickets to political fund-raising events had virtually stopped on school grounds.

Problems with specific implementation efforts of the state included:

- o the central office reorganization had left many personnel with overlapping job responsibilities which resulted in turf battles;
- o the district reorganization into four semi-autonomous clusters resulted in inconsistency;
- o while the district implemented policies aimed at decentralization, an additional layer of bureaucracy resulted in the locals perceiving the state team as being aloof and isolated;
- o legally mandated time lines forced hurried decisions on the important personnel matters of evaluation and hiring; mistakes were made;
- o a new purchase order system, which was poorly designed and implemented, resulted in a huge backlog of orders;
- o a "house plan" for the neighborhood high schools, which had been coercively implemented by the state, was replete with problems; and
- o the district's effort to move towards site-based management and shared decision-making, was stalled several times.[4]

Although this paper does not pretend to be an evaluation of the takeover, the general thesis of this paper is the following: While some improvements have been made by the state, little progress seems to have been made towards building an organization and culture which will result in the long-term ability of the district to improve itself. The remainder of this paper is divided into three sections

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[4]. An individual accounting of these policies--the successes, the problems, and the adaptations--is beyond the scope of this short paper. A detailed analysis may be found in the original work upon which this paper is based (Rettig, 1992).

related to this thesis. First the problems of mixing first-order and second order change efforts (Cuban, 1988) are discussed. Second, six of the implementation themes identified in the study are explored. Finally, the basic problems with takeover are summarized, and a different form of "takeover" is presented.

First-Order and Second-Order Change

Cuban (1988) categorizes school reform efforts as first-order changes and second-order changes. First-order changes improve the efficiency and effectiveness of current educational structures, but the roles of children and adults remain essentially unaltered. Second-order changes, however, attempt to alter fundamental organizational structures, goals, and roles. Similarly, Fullan (1991) described two waves of reform: intensification and restructuring. Intensification is characterized as follows:

> Increased definition of curriculum, mandated textbooks, standardized tests tightly aligned with curriculum, specification of teaching and administrative methods backed up by evaluation, and monitoring all serve to intensify as exactly as possible the what and the how of teaching. (p. 7)

Fullan also described restructuring:

> The other wave, which lagged only slightly behind, goes by the label of "restructuring": It takes many forms, but usually involves school-based management; enhanced roles for teachers in instruction and decision making; integration of multiple innovations; restructured timetables supporting collaborative work cultures; radical reorganization of teacher education; new roles such as mentors, coaches, and other teacher leadership arrangements; and revamping and developing the shared mission and goals of the school among teachers, administrators, the community, and sometimes students. (p. 7)

These conceptualizations of school reform are useful in thinking about the policy initiatives in the takeover of the Jersey City Public Schools; for as Fullan has commented, "...the two approaches are

philosophically and politically at odds, although since politics makes strange bedfellows, we can expect combinations of elements of the two approaches to be integrated in some situations" (p. 7). Jersey City is a prime example of a change effort which is attempting to combine both first-order (intensification) and second order (restructuring) reforms. The conflicting philosophical bases for each of these reform strategies may be the source of several problems with the takeover; it is certainly the source of irony.

Another useful concept to consider when thinking about takeover is Hall's (1990) notion of a "hyper-innovation" or an innovation stack, the characteristics of which include: "a large number of innovations, simultaneous adoption, whole user system 'improvement', [and] a mix of content and process innovations" (p. 17). Takeover, in toto, certainly would be categorized as a first order change--perhaps the ultimate intensification; however, it is a hyper-innovation consisting of many policy initiatives--some of which attempt second-order changes. Most of the changes attempted by the state which were discussed in the study would be classified as first-order. The institution of the "house plan" in the high schools, and the move towards site-based management might be classified as either first-order changes or second-order changes depending upon your perspective, the goals for which they were designed, and the strategies of implementation. On the surface they appear to support the trend towards decentralization of decision-making, which would be categorized as second-order reform, but the purposes inherent in their implementation in the Jersey City Public Schools were perceived by the locals to be in the areas of accountability, monitoring, and evaluation--not altering fundamental organizational structure and roles.

In terms of implementation efforts, the house-plan appeared to be a classic "top-down" coercive attempt at change. The move towards site-based management, although more inclusive than the house plan effort, could be categorized similarly. Data support the existence of a sincere attempt on the

part of the state to embrace the tenets of site-based management, but the policy has been received by the locals as another means of accountability--regardless of its paper goals.

The point is, therefore, that the overall tenor of the takeover has been characterized by intensification, which has included high stakes accountability and evaluation. Consequently, efforts towards changes which purported to offer decentralization of decision-making and site-based management have been viewed with cynicism. The state team is an imposed administration, which need not share its decision-making with a school board. The irony of this administration offering shared decision-making to schools, is not lost of the respondents of this study, nor on other researchers in the field. Hall notes:

> It seems ironic that so many districts are advocating Site-Based Decision Making from the superintendent's office, while the same controls for budgeting, scheduling the class day, and determining the curriculum are in place as were prior to the Site-Based Decision Making initiative. (Hall, 1990, p. 19)

This irony has been even more pronounced in the case of Jersey City where local power has been stripped away. The difficulties the state has encountered regarding the implementation of supposed second-order changes such as the house plan and site-based management suggests that the implementation of second order changes within a overall framework of first order change will not be successful. The skepticism of the locals engendered by the conflict between the intensification emphasis of the takeover effort and the policy initiative of site-based management is illustrated by the comments of a school principal:

> I would say that the State District Superintendent talks a good game about site-based management and the responsibility and authority of the principal; however, it appears to me that as long as things go well, the principal's in charge; but once things go wrong, the principal is no longer in charge.

In addition, while the hyper-innovation that is takeover consists of a variety of popular reform efforts, no clear vision of what the district is to become has emerged from these efforts. The slogan "Kids First", may define the emphasis, and the Corrective Action Plan (Ellis & Scambio, 1990) may outline procedures for achieving state certification, but it is unclear how each of the changes initiated by the state will interact to achieve a "thorough and efficient" education for the children of Jersey City. Although the state rightfully can argue that it is too early in the change process for there to have been any demonstrable effect in individual classrooms (which there has not), one wonders, if without a vision for this change, whether or not such change ever can occur.

Implementation Themes

Several specific implementation themes illuminated the problems inherent with state takeover as a means of creating a district culture with the capacity for self-improvement. Six themes--time, the politics of waiting, insiders-outsiders, expectations, communication, and scope--will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Time. Four aspects of the concept of time had importance in the study. Problems occurred because of the timing of the takeover and the time lines mandated by the takeover law. In addition, locals and state team affiliates continue to debate the time required for substantive change to occur and the semi-determinant time limit on takeover.

The takeover began on October 4, 1989, one month after the beginning of a new school year. There was universal agreement among respondents regarding the disruptive effect of the timing of the state's entry into the district. Children and teachers in schools operate on a nine-month schedule; although few effects of the takeover have been felt in classrooms even two and a half years later, the mere expectation of change has been disturbing. Central office administrators were under the gun immediately; school principals were concerned about their evaluations as well. These anxieties most certainly were transmitted to teachers, diverting time and energy away from their instruction of

students. Although there is surely no "good time" for takeover, if the original administrative exchange had been planned to coincided with the rhythms of the school year, perhaps there would have been less disruption.

In addition to causing disruption at the time of initial takeover, the October 4 start date set into motion a series of legislated deadlines. The evaluation of all central office administrators and the administrative reorganization of the district were to be accomplished within six months (by April 4, 1990); the first three evaluations of the principals were to be completed during the next six months (by October 4, 1990); and the entire evaluation cycle for all principals was to be completed six months later (by April 4, 1991). Given the low level of resources marshalled to complete these tasks, the deadlines were both unreasonable and probably harmful.

The combination of the timing of the takeover and the time lines of the evaluations resulted in the following problems:

- evaluations of central office personnel and principals were cursory;
- promotions, demotions, firings, and transfers were based upon the cursory evaluations;
- central office personnel were informed of their promotion, demotion, firing, or transfer on April 4, 1990. Personnel, who had been demoted, were given interim assignments until they could bump down into positions to which they formerly had been granted tenure. One can only imagine the atmosphere of the central office during the two and a half months prior to the conclusion of school;
- the state was forced into the job market at an awkward time (May-July)--near the end of the time frame during which most top administrative candidates usually are employed; and
- school principals, who had failed the initial three evaluations, received 90-day improvement notices in November of 1990 and focused their efforts until April 4, 1991 on meeting the requirements of their improvement plans.

Unreasonable time lines are recognized widely as contributing to the failure of change efforts. Fullan (1991) commented: "Unrealistic or undefined time lines fail to recognize that implementation occurs developmentally....Bringing about institutional reform can take five or more years. Persistence is a critical attribute of successful change" (p. 106). Elmore and McLaughlin (1988) discussed the difference between the time lines of policy makers and practioners. Policy makers create reforms based upon "electoral time"; however, the reforms must be implemented on the "administrative time" of school administrators and the "practice time" of school teachers (p. 36). In the case of Jersey City there was an unrealistic expectation on the part of the authors of the legislation which was not accompanied by sufficient support to avoid an ill-advised, forced rush to meet the required mandates.

As might be expected the state team and locals have two very different views of the how long change should take. Now that the state is in control, they say "Change will take time"; locals, however, ask: "When will things change?" Locals' unrealistic expectations for quick change will be discussed later in this paper.

Another interesting issue has been the semi-determinant time frame for the takeover. State statute guarantees the takeover for a minimum of five years. Many respondents, regardless of state or local affiliation, predicted either the imminent demise or eventual extension of takeover. During the course of the study opinion regarding this matter changed. Two events may have influenced this transformation of collective opinion: Takeover survived changes in the governor and Commissioner of Education, and in the summer of 1991 the state also assumed control of the Paterson City Schools (Superville, 1991). These events make takeover appear to be less susceptible to the political axe; most respondents now believe that it will be extended. The semi-determinant time frame however has caused both locals and state-affiliates to behave differently; it resulted in the politics of waiting for the locals.

The politics of waiting. For many years local political events routinely affected the schools in Jersey City (Smith, 1982; New Jersey State Department of Education, 1988). Frequently, large scale changes in the school administration (especially in the ranks of the assistant superintendents) followed the four-year cycle of mayoral elections. Long-time Jersey City School employees have exhibited an uncanny ability to survive these changes. Very few school people played politics for keeps; even the winners had to be careful. Although you might be in power today because the candidate you supported had won the election, in four years, who knew? For the losers, "laying in the cut" as one school principal said--waiting and maneuvering while the political landscape rearranged more favorably--became the means of survival.

The semi-determinant time limit on takeover made it *feel* like just another election. Many locals believed the takeover was motivated politically anyway, and because five years was not much longer than the mayor's usual term, why not wait it out? The question for the locals became: If the takeover is going to end and the politicians are going to return, then how should I act? The response for many has been "laying in the cut". As one state team member said: "The insiders are forced to walk a fine line". Too much cooperation and a local might be branded a collaborator; too much resistance and a local might become unemployed. For many, the politics of waiting has been enacted by carefully meting out measures of cooperation and/or passive resistance.

Notwithstanding the passive resistance among locals motivated by the politics of waiting, the literature on change is replete with examples of good reasons for resisting change: "The general conclusion is that one must be wary of innovation and reform, not because the intention of the reformers is evil, but because the solution might be wrong, unimplementable or create adverse side-effects" (Fullan, 1991, p. 25).

The passive resistance of the locals can be subtle; as one school principal described:

> All you have to do is not help; you don't have to do anything. All you have to do is wait. Everyone will goof sometime [including the state] and then you can help or you can watch. [Passive resistance] is not really sabotaging, but not really pushing to get something done.

Thus the politics of waiting, the natural (and probably healthy) tendency of people to resist change, and the coercive and disrespectful nature of takeover have combined to result in a huge barrier to the success of the efforts of the state. Fullan (1991) commented appropriately:

> In some situations resistance may be the only way to maintain sanity and avoid complete cynicism. In the search for meaning in a particular imposed situation, we may conclude that there is no meaning, or that the problem being addressed is only one (and not the most important or strategic) of many problems that should be confronted. (p. 104)

Insiders and outsiders and the problem of respect. There is a clear demarcation between the Jersey City insiders and the state team outsiders. The road to takeover was a media event which publicly decimated the reputation of the Jersey City Public Schools and all who worked there. The locals expected the state to hold them in contempt even before the first state team member was appointed. More than any racial, cultural, or gender-related characteristic, status as an insider or outsider divides the employees of the district. This mutual mistrust makes progress on complex changes difficult.

A closer look at this theme reveals that the probability of success of the takeover may be lowered through the operation of several mechanisms:

- the takeover statute, with its emphasis on the dismissal of incompetents, evaluation, and accountability, implied that the state could improve the district by replacing certain personnel, who would in turn force the district into compliance;

- the temporary nature of the takeover and the authority and power granted the state team may have reduced the motivation of outsiders to become socialized within the district, thus preventing the effective communication and the development of shared meanings necessary for successful change efforts; and
- several early change efforts reinforced the local perception of a lack of respect on the part of the state.

The takeover statute, with its provisions for the removal of the school board and high level administrative staff, implied that the necessary improvements could be accomplished by replacing incompetent or corrupt administrators with competent and moral administrators. These new administrators could then force other employees to improve. Although it is highly doubtful that such a strategy would be successful given what is known about the change process, a compromise reached in the New Jersey Assembly during the debate over the takeover law (Antonelli, 1990) removed the possibility of the wholesale replacement of administrative employees. Administrators whose positions were abolished, or who were removed from jobs, had the right to "bump down" into positions to which they previously had been granted tenure. Many remained in central office; some bumped down into the schools; few were fired outright. Consequently the numbers of administrators of local affiliation remaining in the district dwarfs the transfusion of new blood into the system. Replacing incompetents might have provided an infusion of new ideas and talent, but simply transplanting one small administrative team for another did not obviate the need for attending to the tenets of the change process.

Thus, because it was virtually impossible to effect wholesale personnel replacement, integration and "relearning" has become crucial: "Unless people are going to be replaced with others who have different desirable characteristics, relearning is at the heart of change" (Fullan, 1991, p. 106). Unable to replace them, the state must deal with the people and culture of the organization. As one

local respondent noted: "You are also dealing with people. You may change the organizational structure, but you still have to deal with the existing people and the culture of the organization". This can only be accomplished through involvement and interaction between insiders and outsiders. Locals must participate in the plans for implementation.

Two factors which may deter involvement and interaction between insiders and outsiders are the temporary nature of the takeover and the legitimate authority and power granted the state team through the takeover legislation. Locals' reactions to the "temporariness" of takeover have been described in the section on the politics of waiting. The temporal nature of takeover, however, also may be affecting the actions of the state team. State team members knew from their initial appointments that their positions were temporary. What effect has the knowledge that their positions were temporary had on their actions? What about other outsiders who have been appointed by the state team? How secure do they feel regarding their jobs given the ephemeral tenure of their sponsors? From the perspective of state team members--who knew they were short-timers, and other outsiders--who were not sure of their long term status, there has been little motivation to become socialized into the system.

Gordon and Rosen (1981) suggested that high rates of succession may cause leaders to become more authoritarian and task-oriented. It logically follows, therefore, that if administrators know that their jobs are temporary (such as in takeover), then there is a greater press to accomplish goals quickly--and a greater likelihood of autocratic leadership. With no local board of education checking the power of the state team this likelihood increases. Evidence from this study suggests that the house plan was forced upon the high schools without sufficiently involving the teachers and administrators who were to implement it. One might hypothesize that with this power in hand, the state team does not see the need to convince--because they have the right to compel. The desire to convince encourages two-way communication; the ability to compel encourages edicts and isolation.

Research in the field of organizational socialization has revealed that leaders adjust and accommodate to their organizations (Hart, 1992; Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985). The new leader engages in the process of "fitting in" (Hart, p. 459) and is forced to interact with and understand the realities of the people in the organization. It is through this contact and socialization that shared meanings are developed and the barriers between "insiders" and "outsiders" dissipate. The temporary nature of their appointments and the coercive nature of takeover may have dissuaded the state team from engaging in this process of "fitting in". Indeed, one principal suggested: "My sense is that they are beginning to have a siege mentality. They feel as though people are starting to get active against them, and they must pull back in a little group of four people, like Nixon did, and talk among themselves". Not only may the outsiders be unmotivated to integrate with the insiders because of the temporary nature of their positions, but the insiders have placed barriers in the newcomers' paths to essential social learning of the organization, as well.

Expectations. An important aspect of takeover has been the incredible atmosphere of expectations which has permeated its first two years. The events which took place prior to the takeover were seminal in determining the expectations of the locals for takeover. As Gordon and Rosen (1981) noted, this in itself is not unusual:

> An integral part of the succession process is that which occurs *prior* to the successor's arrival; the forces that are set in motion when the impending succession is made known deserve attention on their own....The reason for succession [may] act as a moderating variable... (p. 240)

The pre-arrival factors related to succession were not the only aspects of takeover fostering unrealistically high expectations for change. The locals' perceptions of the state team's power also led to high expectations. For the locals the rules had changed. There was no school board; central office administrators and principals were to be evaluated closely and their tenure appeared to be at

stake. The State District Superintendent had been granted greater legitimate control over personnel, finances, and all aspects of policy-making and operations than had any previous superintendent. S/he also had a direct line through the bureaucracy of the state; s/he should be able to make things happen. The degree of legitimate power granted to the superintendent has been a major difference between this takeover and traditional leader succession.

Although the locals' expectations for change were high at the beginning of the takeover, they have been altered based upon their first experiences with the state's change efforts. The first few initiatives of the takeover have been important in determining the expectations for later initiatives. As Fullan has commented:

> Since introducing innovations is a way of life in most school systems, districts build up track records in managing change. Whatever the track record at a given point in time, it represents a significant precondition relative to the next new initiative" (p. 73).

Three of the first initiatives of the state illustrate how this process has operated in Jersey City. The redesign of the purchase order system was criticized by most respondents as being a disaster. As a result, the comments of locals throughout the term of the study reflected lowered expectations for the state's ability to handle the problems of the district. The state may argue that "change takes time", but in the case of the purchase order system there is little reason to believe that this sort of technical change, unhindered by value conflicts, would require a lengthy time to implement. An analysis of this initiative using Berman's (1981) framework of situational parameters implied that programmed implementation strategies should have been successful. Respondents expected this innovation to work; when it did not, they complained bitterly.

Conversely, an analysis of the situational parameters surrounding the house plan initiative revealed the need for the use of adaptive implementation strategies. It was a major change effort with uncertain definitions and technology. Consideration of a house plan was replete with value conflicts.

High schools are loosely coupled institutional settings, and in Jersey City they operate in a highly unstable environment. The data reveal, however, that the state applied programmed implementation strategies to this attempt at change, and it foundered quickly. In the eyes of the locals these problems overshadowed other successes.

Communication. There are at least three facets to the communication problems which have plagued the takeover. A lack of clarity regarding the goals and means of innovations has contributed to the implementation problems with the purchase order system, the district reorganization, the house plan, and the site-based management effort. Second, the perceived lack of personal contact between state team members and locals has exacerbated the climate of insider-outsider conflict, which in turn has discouraged personal contacts between insiders and outsiders. Finally, poor access to local communication sources has delayed the reception of crucial implementation feedback by the state.

In terms of the new purchase order system, the data of the study suggest that procedures were not clearly understood. The words of one school principal were typical of the general feeling among locals: "Now all of a sudden the rules have changed and you have to prepare the purchase order at the school level, which is fine, but no one told us this [all of the details]".

Another problem which occurred was that the roles of cluster supervisors (working for the individual clusters) and district supervisors (working in the district office) were not clearly communicated. Almost a year from the time of the district reorganization (April 4, 1990) these roles had yet to be clarified. One central office administrator commented: "We are still struggling with how to mingle the operations side with the program development side--how to mix and mingle the roles of the supervisors in the cluster as opposed to the supervisors who are at the central office".

The house plan also was poorly communicated. The union head's words typify local respondents' feelings: "We had no idea what this house plan was. We had no idea where to go". Moreover, knowledge of the state's intentions regarding the plan for site-based management was skimpy. The

state team eventually held informational meetings and distributed written materials, but many respondents' first information regarding the plan came from the newspaper.

The takeover team also was perceived as being aloof and distant by the locals. By most reports The State District Superintendent's forays into the schools were successful; however, many respondents commented that it would be wise for state team members to get into the schools more often. In turn state team members expressed their disappointment at not being able to visit schools more frequently. The importance of *sincere* personal contact in the diffusion of innovations is well-documented (Fullan, 1991, p. 53).

It is possible, however, that more frequent communication and contact might not ameliorate the climate of insider-outsider conflict; some efforts of the state have been seen as being pro forma and insincere. As one teacher stated after attending a meeting with the State District Superintendent: "She was going through the motions--doing what she knew to be right". Monane (1967) explained this phenomenon similarly:

> Positive effects depend on the legitimacy of the interaction. Neither increased similarity nor increased contact appears "independently or jointly productive of positive effect in systems where hostility is the legitimate expected" outcome of contact. (Hart p. 463)

While it is certainly true that, "Solutions come through the development of *shared meaning*, [and] the interface between the individual and collective meaning and action in everyday situations is where change stands or falls" (Fullan, 1991, p. 5), clarity and shared meaning will not be developed in a climate of communication that is perceived as being insincere.

The poor communication climate also slowed access to valuable information regarding the progress of various implementation efforts. The State District Superintendent was slow to learn of the difficulties in the implementation of the house plan. When s/he became aware of this information problem, s/he adapted by instituting a system of ad hoc feedback sessions in which small randomly

selected job-related groups were brought together for the purpose of discussing the progress and the problems of the takeover. These sessions were seen by the locals as being a sincere attempt to gather input from employees in the field.

A lack of clarity, perceived minimal personal contact between insiders and outsiders, and slow feedback are phenomena of communication which lower the probability of success of any of the state-initiated changes.

Scope: The interaction of pressure and support.

The scope of the change effort underway in Jersey City is immense. The catalogue of policy initiatives being attempted would be formidable for any district, but given the context of Jersey City, it is nearly unbelievable. A relationship exists between the scope of a change effort and the combination of pressure and support. Pressure and support are both needed for the success of change efforts (McLaughlin, 1987, 1990). "Cooptation, symbolic response, or non-compliance" result when pressure alone is applied (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 173). Fullan (1991) agreed: "Pressure without support leads to resistance and alienation; support without pressure leads to drift or waste of resources" (p. 91).

"Cooptation", "symbolic response", "non-compliance", "resistance", and "alienation" describe the attitude of many Jersey City locals to the takeover. This reaction suggests either an overdose of pressure or an under-dose of support--probably both. Without sufficient support, the extreme-pressure applied by the state resulted in an environment characterized by poor timing and unreasonable time lines, insider-outsider conflicts, the politics of waiting, unreasonable and unmet expectations, and poor communication--in short--not the sort of change that will result in the improvement of the district's capacity to heal itself.

Why is the application of both pressure and support important to the success of change efforts? The answer lies in the relationship of pressure and support to the two goals of change efforts: changes

in actions and changes in beliefs. Conventional wisdom regarding the change process argues that belief must precede action--ownership is a prerequisite for successful change. Yet as McLaughlin (1990) has stated: "Individuals required to change routines or take up new practices can become believers...belief or commitment can follow mandated or coerced involvement at both the individual and the system level" (p. 12).

In the case of Jersey City there has been very little belief on the part of the locals in the changes initiated by the state. If through a combination of pressure and support the state team could have motivated action for a long enough period for belief to develop, perhaps believers would have been made, and positive change would have occurred. The missing link in this plan, however, has been support. Massive doses of support appear to be needed to overcome the resistance created as a result of the pressure applied.

The model in Figure 1 attempts to portray graphically the complicated relationship between pressure and support and belief and action[5]. As was suggested previously, both pressure and support are required for successful change. A low level of pressure leads to apathy; a low level of support results in a lack of necessary resources. Conversely, an overly high level of pressure leads to resistance; an overabundance of support leads to waste.[6] Figure 1 suggests that there are upper and lower limits to the necessary levels of pressure and support required for successful change. A combination of low pressure and low support results in inaction. The combination of too much pressure and too much support can lead to an expensive disaster. Additionally the model shows that successful change efforts result in changes in both belief and action.

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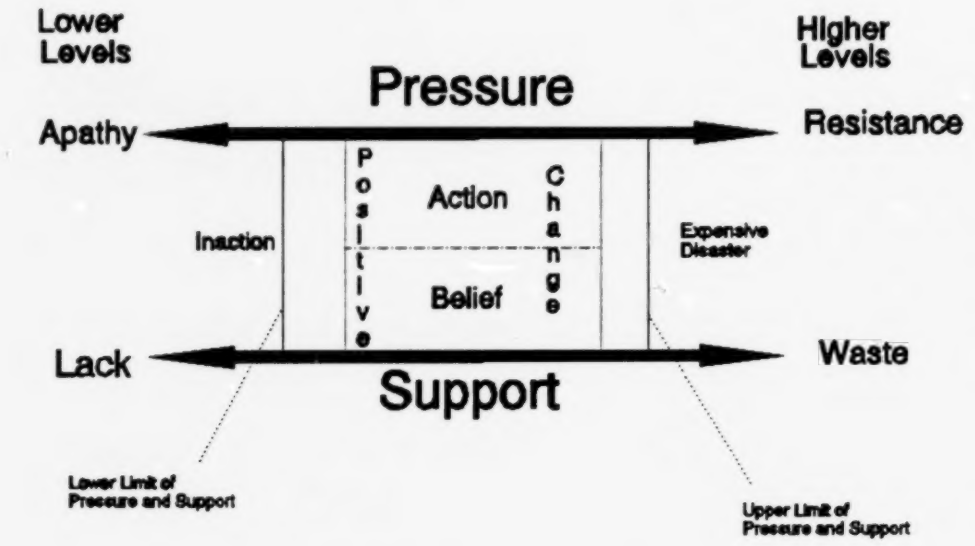
[5]. The operation of this model is influenced by the following situational parameters (Berman, 1981) which were discussed previously: scope of change, certainty of technology or theory, conflict over the policy's goals and means, structure of the institutional setting, and stability of the environment.

[6]. The line between pressure and support blurs; pressure is implicit when high levels of support are provided.

FIGURE 1

Pressure and Support



The state underestimated the support needed to implement successfully their initiatives given the climate extant in Jersey City upon their arrival. The state team admitted to underestimating the problems. The State District Superintendent commented:

> We keep finding new things each day [which] is frustrating. There are problems that were not evident from the compliance investigation that preceded the takeover--pre-takeover things that go way beyond what we expected. You'll pick up a piece of paper to examine an issue and find a huge quagmire underneath.

One central office worker commented: "I don't know if they underestimated the scope of the problems; I think they underestimated the scope of the solution."

The word "takeover" implies a massive change--a takeover of an entire operation. Other lessons learned from research on the scope of change suggest that it may not be wise to begin in this fashion. Given the level of support available for the takeover, perhaps a smaller start would have been advisable (Fullan, 1991; Louis & Miles, 1989; Sarason, 1971). As one respondent commented: "Why are they going whole hog?...Why couldn't they have done it gradually? Move in first and try to deal with the money--trim that down. Then maybe fix special ed. [education], and as they clean-up each closet move on to the next closet".

Summary

As states continue to wrestle with issues related to educational accountability, many have considered options such as takeover to help improve deficient schools. It may be impossible for takeover to be an effective means of ameliorating the problems of deficient school districts. While it is too soon to make this judgement in the case of Jersey City, early evidence from the respondents in this exploratory study suggests that the district's ability to sustain positive and systemic educational change has not improved. The problems evident in the takeover of the Jersey City Schools do suggest improvements in this process. Whether or not these improvements would result in takeover becoming a viable means of building a district's capacity for self-improvement, is debatable. Nevertheless, issues which must be addressed when a takeover is implemented are reviewed. Finally, another form of takeover is briefly outlined as an alternative policy option.

Problem: Insider-outsider conflict. Positive change cannot occur in an environment characterized by mistrust, fear, disrespect, and coercion. Can a takeover process be designed which lessens this conflict?

Problem: Timing and time lines. Takeover will always be disruptive, yet careful timing could limit the disruption. Unreasonable time lines force unreasoned decisions. Can a takeover process be designed which takes into account issues of timing and time lines?

Problem: Overly high expectations. The takeover placed the responsibility for improving the district on the state. This phenomenon resulted in disengagement and passive resistance on the part of the locals. Could a takeover process be designed in which the major responsibility for improvement remains with the locals?

Problem: Communication. Much of the decision-making of the takeover team has been behind closed doors. Could a process be designed which is more open?

Problem: Goals and evaluation. What are the goals of a takeover? Compliance with state standards? Increased test scores? New programs? Return of local control? How should the evaluation of takeover be designed? Can a takeover process be designed which reasonably addresses these issues?

Another Plan

The following plan attempts to address the aforementioned difficulties; it assumes a similar context to that extant in Jersey City. Undoubtedly, this suggestion, too, will meet with criticism. It does; however, reflect more of what is known regarding the process of change than the takeover currently being implemented in Jersey City.

If radical state intervention into the operation of a school district is judged to be necessary, at a minimum, the school board and superintendent should be removed from office. It must be assumed that the superintendent was unwilling or unable to improve the district, and the school board was unwilling or unable to remove the superintendent. It may be necessary to remove other members of the central office school administration as well. The final phase of state monitoring should include the fair and detailed evaluation of these personnel with recommendations for additional dismissals, if necessary.

Once the decision is made to intervene, an elected local takeover committee consisting of representatives of central office administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and classified personnel should be assembled to plan the implementation. A state education official would act as a facilitator to the committee. The takeover committee would decide upon a date for the takeover, a date for a new school board election, and a date for the appointment of a new permanent superintendent. The committee also would select an interim superintendent from a list of candidates provided by the state. The candidates could be drawn from the state education department or from other localities, who might be willing to temporarily loan an administrator. The interim superintendent would nominate other administrators to fill temporarily any additional positions which had become vacant. These nominations would be subject to the approval of the takeover committee.

The function of the interim superintendent would be to administer the district until a new school board could be elected. The new board would select a permanent superintendent. An outside firm would be hired as consultant to the superintendent search. To prevent any conflict of interest or the appearance of political deal-making, the interim administrators could not be candidates for any positions within the district for a period of three years.

The state would provide the newly elected school board with intense training regarding the responsibilities and limitations of their positions. The new school board also would be briefed by the takeover committee, who would disband after such a meeting. Once the new superintendent has been selected, the interim would remain for a short transition period. Positions held temporarily by interim administrators would be filled in a normal fashion, through the superintendent's nomination and the approval of the school board. Again, interim administrators would remain through the transition period.

Once all new personnel were in place, the district would resume local control and normal operations. Interim administrators would depart. State monitors would continue to attend board meetings. The state department of education would continue to provide intense technical assistance.

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